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ABSTRACT

Since the early 1980s, more and more businesses have been motivated to enter into business/education partnerships to improve the academic and technical skills of the future work force. In the one-to-one institutional partnership, the needs of one school and/or one business drive the agreement. As partnerships expand to involve multiple partners, the agreements become more complex and the benefits more far reaching. When businesses engage in collaborative partnerships, they look for benefits that affect their operation, productivity, and profit line. Because the benefits of business/education partnerships are related to the goals of the partnerships, they are better described within the context of their particular focus. Those focusing on classroom teaching and learning expose teachers to new technology, give them authentic work, and assist them in transferring work experience into classrooms. The impact of these experiences is the belief that partnerships are an investment in the future. Partnerships that focus on vocational education program development can involve cooperative development of materials and business supply of equipment and grants and funds. In partnerships that focus on cooperative apprenticeships, community colleges receive equipment, facilities, and training for faculty; benefits to business are remedial programs for employees, onsite administrative support provided by the college, and college-assisted recruitment of new trainees. Work experience programs are another focus of partnerships. (Contains 11 references.) (YLB)

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Business/Education Partnerships

by Bettina A. Lankard

1995

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Businesses and schools have been involved with each other since the late 1800s, and their relationship formalized into partnerships since the late 1970s. However, the conditions in the United States in the early 1980s—the education crisis in public schools, the low skill level of entry-level workers, and the demands of an evolving economy—accelerated the development of these partnerships. "Between 1983-1984 and 1987-88, the number of business/education partnerships rose from 42,200 to 140,800" (Grobe et al. 1993, p. 4). As they expanded in number, these partnerships also expanded in dimension, from simple one-to-one agreements to complex multiagency collaborative arrangements. This expansion of partners and agendas has resulted in an expansion of benefits for all of the partners embracing the partnership goals. This ***Digest*** is designed to bring new perspective to an understanding of business/education partnerships. Traditionally, these partnerships have been viewed from the perspective of the benefits to education. This ***Digest*** highlights the ways in which partnering with education benefits business.

History of Partnerships

Initially, educational partnerships were created by school system staff to "foster school-community cooperation, provide incentives for students, supplement curriculum and staff, and obtain equipment" (Clark 1992, p. 2). Business gains from these relationships were primarily in improved public relations and enhanced community image (Grobe et al. 1993). In the early 1980s, school reform reports called for changes that would ultimately transform the nature of education and business partnerships. Schools were faced with the need for educational reform measures that would better prepare a diverse student population for the higher order thinking and reasoning skills required in an increasingly knowledge-based, service-driven economy. Businesses were faced with the threat of an inadequately prepared work force that would jeopardize their competition with other industrialized nations. Motivated to improve the academic and technical skills of the future work force, businesses and schools joined in partnerships of various sizes and types to achieve their common and separate goals.

Types of Partnerships

The type and nature of business/education partnerships vary depending upon the need the partnership is created to serve. In the one-to-one institutional partnership, the needs of one school and/or one business drive the agreement. Traditionally, business is the benefactor and the school the beneficiary. With this arrangement, schools benefit from the generosity of their business partners by receiving up-to-date equipment, incentives for student attendance and scholarship, and orportunities for students to learn about the real-world application of knowledge and skill. Businesses' involvement in such traditional partnerships is typically philanthropically inspired, but it can also be attached to long-term goals that reflect self-interest—a better prepared entry-level work force that would reduce training costs, increase productivity, and improve products and services.

Some one-to-one business/education partnerships, however, are created to resolve the more immediate needs of a given business or company. According to Stone (1991), the Office of Technology Assessment estimates that "20% to 30% of U.S. workers lack the basic skills they need for their current jobs" (p. 48). Motivated by this skill crisis, businesses such as Motorola and General Motors are joining with educators to offer basic skills courses to their employees. Other companies, such as Boeing and Honeywell, are forming alliances with local community colleges and technical institutions to upgrade their workers' technical skills (Dreyfuss 1990). In the one-to-one partnership, the agreements can be targeted simply and specifically to a given problem.

As partnerships expand to involve multiple partners, the agreements become more complex and the benefits more far reaching. Both education and business are full partners in these agreements, which formally detail "each partner's responsibilities and expected outcomes and imply a reciprocal commitment between or among partners" (Clark 1992, p. 2). Such partnerships attempt to involve a number of agencies in multiservice projects that are jointly planned and governed, for example, dropout prevention, employability training, workplace literacy. They build upon the identification and acceptance of compatible goals and strategies for improving some aspect of education through mutual cooperation (Grobe et al. 1993). One example of a cooperative agreement between the public school system and local businesses, universities, and labor is the Boston Compact, in which partners work cooperatively to provide high quality education for all children in the Boston school system (ibid.). Another example of a cooperative partnership agreement is the Minneapolis Youth Trust, which is a collaborative of major employers, city and state agencies, social service organizations, and the public schools. Through the partnership, these multiple constituents developed an apprenticeship and summer employment initiative and a mentorship program (Clark 1992).

The comprehensive collaborative is a broader approach than the cooperative agreement. Comprehensive collaboratives are "represented on the continuum (of school-community partnerships) as the most sophisticated and fully developed partnership. Broad-based and involving multiple organizations, comprehensive collaboratives require long-term institutional commitment. They proceed with a commonly shared vision, goals and objectives developed through consensus, shared authority and decision making, new roles and relationships for the various players, integrated delivery of multiple services and cross-institutional activities" (Clark 1992, p. 2). The Boston Compact evolved into this form of partnership as it grew in members and expanded in focus to address the increasing and varied concerns regarding the comprehensive needs of children from grades K-12.

When businesses engage in collaborative partnerships, they look for benefits that affect their operation, productivity, and profit line—elements that enable them to be competitive in a changing society. Such benefits as improved public relations, better prepared entry-level employees, decreased training costs, increased productivity, and heightened potential for local economic development will all affect their "bottom line." Hall et al. (1993) note the following advantages realized by businesses partnering with the Springfield Public School District #186 (p. 2):

- Corporate image is enhanced.
- The organization has a greater visibility in the community.
- Organizations can observe how tax dollars prepare students for the future.
- Individual participants within the organization derive personal satisfaction from assisting in the development of productive citizens.
- The relationship helps prepare future employees.

Whatever the type of business and education partnership, the benefits must be realized by all partners or the arrangement is not a partnership (Grobe et al. 1993). In successful partnerships, the benefits radiate from one partner to another, resulting in rewards for all constituencies—business, education, higher education, parents, and communities. For example, education's gains of increased access to new technology, enhanced opportunities for professional growth and development, and increased staff morale and student success that reduces such problems as violence, truancy, suspension, and dropout rates all contribute to the gains realized by business. A better prepared work force, increased public confidence and support for education, and an improved quality of community life heighten the potential for local economic development and improve the economic health of businesses and of the entire country.

Focus of Partnerships

Because the benefits of business and education partnerships are related to the goals of the partnership, they are better described within the context of their particular focus.

Focus: Classroom Teaching and Learning. Kubota (1993) describes teacher-focused partnerships for scientific work experience programs. The goal of these partnerships was to "expose teachers to new technology, give teachers authentic work with real world problems in laboratories or businesses, provide teachers opportunities to interact with scientists and other technically trained professionals, and assist teachers in transferring work experience into classrooms" (p. 1). These experiences helped teachers to improve their mathematics and science teaching strategies, transfer work experiences back to the classroom, and act as change agents within the school systems; the businesses involved gained a new appreciation of teachers and the teaching profession. The impact of experiences such as this one are the trust and belief that "partnerships are a necessary investment in the future and that they will, indeed, make a difference" (ibid., p. 2).

Focus: Vocational Education Program Development. Evaluation of the automotive program of Los Angeles Harbor College by outside consultants led to a partnership between Harbor College and Hyundai—one founded on the needs of both partners. The evaluation report led Harbor College to recognize the potential of its automotive department through the retooling of its program and resources. Hyundai, looking to establish a satellite training program for its technicians, saw Harbor College as a training resource. Both partners invested in the arrangement. Together, the partners developed the training materials and technical skill modules for the program. Hyundai trained (and certified) instructors from Harbor College. Hyundai supplied $150,000 in equipment, including cars, tools, and training aides; Harbor College used grants and curriculum development funds to supplement the funding from Hyundai. (Evaluation and Training Institute 1993).

Focus: Apprenticeships. Cooperative apprenticeships are "a form of structured workplace training in which (a) employers and labor unions join with community colleges to provide formal instruction in which a structured work-based experience is an integral part of the instruction, (b) an apprentice agrees to work for the employer for a specified period of time, (c) the employer agrees to provide structured and formal training in a specific field or trade over a defined period of time, and (d) the employer provides continued journeyman level employment after the training is successfully completed" (Cantor 1994, p. 9). In partnerships that focus on cooperative apprenticeships, all parties must be able to derive benefits, collectively access external funding, mediate to reach common goals, and agree on specific roles and responsibilities (ibid.). Community colleges receive equipment, facilities, and training for their faculty; employers have an opportunity to participate in program and course development. Remedial programs for employees of the business, onsite administrative support provided by the college, and college-assisted recruitment of new trainees are a few of the benefits realized by business (ibid.).

Focus: Work Experience Programs. Southern California Edison Company and its unions entered into a job skills partnership with local high schools to offer mentoring services to juniors and seniors. Paired with journeyperson mentors for a full year, students experienced 6-week rotations in maintenance, operations, administration, warehouse, and technical occupations. The Utility Workers of America, Local #245 was actively involved in the program, as was the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local #47. The success of the program is evidenced by an increased number of schools and businesses involved since its inception. Initiated in 1 school with 5 students at 1 Edison facility, the program grew by the third year to include 11 partner schools with 44 students placed at 6 Edison facilities (Ingles 1994).

Future of Business and Education Partnerships

In a special issue of ***Fortune*** (Spring 1990), Morrison notes that businesses are "taking the lead in a long-term revolution to save public education" (p. 8). "Leading the field are such companies as IBM, Exxon, Coca-Cola, RJR Nabisco, and Citicorp, which have mounted a virtual crusade to save the public schools" (Dumaine 1990, p. 12). In the new economy, where school and work are intertwined, it is increasingly apparent that a dual approach to public school reform has appeal and that business and education partnerships will continue to flourish in an attempt to improve the educational capacity of the nation.

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